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Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5946th meeting

Wednesday, 30 July 2008, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Le Luong Minh	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. La Yifan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Spatafora
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Mubarak
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Ms. Qwabe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Collard
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (S/2008/226)

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08-44376 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Expression of farewell to Mr. Marcello Spatafora, Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations

The President: As this is the last time that Ambassador Marcello Spatafora will participate in a Council meeting in his capacity as Permanent Representative of Italy, I wish to take this opportunity to express to him, on behalf of the members of the Council, our appreciation of him, both as a colleague and as a friend. Ambassador Spatafora's diplomatic skill, affable manner and sense of collegiality have made him a highly effective representative of his country. His distinguished career has been characterized by many challenging postings, where he has always endeavoured to build bridges and achieve better understanding.

Ambassador Spatafora will be remembered as a fervent advocate of the work of the Council who always strived to work in cooperation and harmony with other Council members. His remarkable contributions to the work of the Council and the passion he has put into his work by speaking straight from his heart will always be remembered by his colleagues with gratitude.

In bidding Ambassador Spatafora a fond farewell, the other members of the Council and I wish him every success in his new undertakings.

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): I thank you very much, Mr. President, for your words. To you and to all my colleagues and friends around this table go my most sincere thanks for the friendship and the cooperation that have been offered me. Thanks to all the members of the Council, my experience in the Security Council has been very rewarding.

There have been a lot of challenges and achievements. There has also been, unfortunately, a lot of frustration when we have not succeeded in delivering what the outside world, especially those who are the most vulnerable and those who suffer on the ground, was expecting from us and from the United Nations.

There is indeed an ever-increasing demand by the people of the world for a more effective Security Council action and presence. Expectations to that end are very high and important challenges are ahead of this Council. I believe that the best way for the Council to be successful in addressing the issues before it, however difficult and sensitive they may be, is first of all to strengthen its listening culture. That listening culture should be more open and receptive to the feelings and values prevailing among the members in general and among interested parties in particular. We sit here around this table on behalf of all United Nations Member States, and if we do not nurture within the membership at large a perception of ownership of the Security Council's proceedings, then it will be difficult at the end of the day to have implementation and compliance, because implementation and compliance will be there only if ownership is preserved at the same time.

There should be no surprise that Article 25 of the Charter concerning the binding nature of the decisions of the Council, is fading from our radar screen. The listening culture that I was referring to implies that we have to make every possible effort to understand each other. To do so is a sign of strength, not of weakness. If we listen and understand, it will be easier to work together with equal dignity and mutual respect, which are building blocks towards effectiveness and results-oriented action.

We must never lose sight of the fact that what matters most at the end of the day is to be able to deliver and have an impact on the ground, so that the Security Council will make a difference and be perceived as doing so. What is at stake is our credibility and our relevance, and I am grateful to all my colleagues here for how we have managed to make some progress along the path before us in preventing the progressive irrelevance and marginalization of this Council, a situation in which all of us in the international community at large would be losers.

For me, these 19 months in the Security Council have been months in which I have learned a lot. I have been indeed fortunate to work together with the entire Council on so many challenging and sensitive issues along a common path towards our common and shared objectives. I will take with me a lot of memories and, I suppose, a lot of nostalgia too.

Allow me to conclude by quoting from a farewell letter that my wife and I received from the United Nations African Mothers Association, an important association that is very close to our hearts. The letter, signed by the President of the Association,

Mrs. Kumalo, the wife of the Permanent Representative of South Africa, recalls that "in Africa we say mountains never meet, but people who have ever crossed each others' path are likely to meet again". With those words, I say farewell to all of my friends here, and I urge them to take care of themselves and of their loved ones. I will not forget them.

The President: I thank Ambassador Spatafora for his statement. Once again, I wish him all the best.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia

Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (S/2008/226)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/491, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Belgium. Members also have before them document S/2008/226, containing the special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and document S/2008/496, containing a letter dated 28 July 2008 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1827 (2008).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mr. Grauls (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): The end of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), eight years after its creation and eight years after the end of the war between the two countries, is an important decision for the Security Council.

The border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea remains unresolved, and the United Nations is withdrawing without having been able to help the two countries find common ground, but not without having tried everything possible to achieve that. Neither the good offices of the Secretary-General nor the constructive proposals presented to the parties by the Council were able to attain their objective.

Unfortunately, the work of UNMEE is coming to an end not because its mandate has been accomplished, but because that mandate has become impossible to carry out. As a peacekeeping mission, UNMEE was increasingly restricted in its freedom of movement by Eritrea, to the point that it was compelled to leave the buffer zone that it was initially supposed to monitor. As an administrative and logistical support mission for border demarcation, UNMEE was also hindered in fulfilling that area of its mandate by Ethiopia's refusal to implement the decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission.

The responsibility for the current impasse rests with the parties and with them alone. Only they can decide to emerge from the vicious circle by ending the fruitless game of mutual accusations and by choosing the path of dialogue, in the primary interest of their populations and in the interest of peace in the Horn of Africa. The international community remains ready to assist them in doing so.

Despite the substantive impasse, Belgium, like the vast majority of other Council members, would have preferred to maintain a United Nations presence on the ground as a tangible signal of the availability of the United Nations to work for a balanced and lasting solution. In fact, the two countries reject such a presence.

Belgium hopes that, once the tension created by the turmoil surrounding UNMEE and its future has abated, an atmosphere more conducive to dialogue will emerge. The resolution that we have just adopted calls on the Secretary-General to continue his efforts and to keep the Council regularly informed.

The Algiers Agreements and the decisions of the Boundary Commission remain the legal basis upon which dialogue will have to be built. The Council calls firmly on Ethiopia and Eritrea to cooperate in the process of terminating UNMEE and to scrupulously avoid any hindrance to the smooth functioning of that process.

As the Mission closes, Belgium gratefully thanks the troop-contributing countries and all the military and civilian personnel involved in its work.

The President: Before adjourning this meeting, I should like, on behalf of the Council, to express sincere thanks to all the men and women who have served the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea over the past seven years for their dedication and professionalism in carrying out the mandate entrusted to them by the Security Council.

There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.